Branding of the Anti-Market Brands: 'Imagine' Lennon and 'Pop' Bono

E. Taçli Yazicioglu, Bogazici University, Turkey

Brands are meant to be compelling, not repelling or compromising to the market. Yet, there are anti-market rock brands that often prefer to create social tension, but still represent the most profitable business ventures in the world. This study reveals preliminary findings by initially focusing on two anti-market rock brands, Lennon and Bono who try to legitimize both their commercial success, philanthropy and activism while preserving their authenticity through market (melo)drama and consumer empowerment. The findings plot promising insights for the branding.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/1007000/eacr/vol9/E-09

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
Branding of the Anti-Market Brands: ‘Imagine’ Lennon and ‘Pop’ Bono
E. Taçlı Yazıcıoğlu, Bogazici University, Turkey

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Brands are cultural, ideological and political objects (Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Schroeder and Salzer-Mörling 2006; Askegaard 2006; Lash and Lyury 2007). Whilst the importance of branding has been developed, paradoxically, the consumer resistance and anti-branding movement has also become a central part of consumer culture (Klein 1999; Kozinets 2002; Holt 2002; Askegaard 2006) mainly towards global brands (Firat 2004; Yazıcıoğlu and Firat 2007; Hollembek and Zinkhan 2006; Thompson and Arsel 2004; Varman and Belk 2009). Brand managers neither like consumer resistance nor any tensions, thinking that any one of these would destroy their brands. Ironically, there are anti-market brands that prefer to create tensions, but still become successful: The rock brands. The growing literature that points to the centrality of the music in the historical process of cultural production and distribution (Attili 1985; Born 1993; Bradshaw, McDonagh, Sherlock, and Bradshaw 2005; Giesler and Schroeder 2006; Bradshaw, McDonagh, and Marshall 2006; Hesmondhalgh 2008; Bradshaw and Shankar 2008; Yazıcıoğlu and Firat 2008) also supports the importance of this type of branding.

In the pursuit to answer such issues, this research initially focuses on the two anti-market rock brands that have both been regarded as symbols of political and musical prominence: Lennon and Bono. This paper reports the preliminary findings of this comprehensive research.

Brands represent capitalist institutions which generate their own series of productive practices (Arvidsson 2006). Lennon and Bono, as brand extensions of The Beatles and U2, are among those who illustrate the myth-emboding power and self-promoted mass-mediated and the anti-market brands of rock. Both brands are also recognized due to their musical prominence, anti-war and anti-market public personas, and provide us a rich texture. Lennon and Bono can also mediate iconographic modes of remembering and provoke controversies and tensions in the public. The richness of the literature applauding and despising Lennon and Bono has also supported the choice of these two rock brands.

The tension between art and commerce (e.g., Holbrook 2005; Venkatesh and Meamber 2006; Schroeder 2005) is inherent in many forms of art, but the music, the rock brands in particular represent a big industry. The traditional role of the artist in opposing bourgeois values as opposed to economic pragmatics is even required for survival and sustenance in the competitive music industry (Bradshaw, Sherlock, and McDonagh 2003). Branding intersects with arts as Schroeder (2005) finds that in the visual arts. Musical brands can utilize branding and commerciality to reduce their reliance on the market (Bradshaw, McDonagh, and Marshall 2006; Klabacki and Croft 2004), despite the context highly differs from visual arts. A reproduction of a painting is almost worthless and despised, but the success of a rock musician is rated by the number of albums/CDs sold.

To best study the meanings and elements of the anti-market rock brands, the relevant aspects of the sociology of (rock) music and brand theory were abstracted and linked with the rich literature on Lennon and Bono. In the research, multiple methods that include content analysis (Kassarjian 1971) and in-depth interviews with projectionary questions have been used to find the diversified, complex and common elements of this type of branding. To conduct an initial coding scheme, the narratives of both brands were extracted from the newspaper and magazine articles and books and written to a document for coding by using iterative and inductive analysis (Kolbe and Burnett 1991; Mulvey and Stern 2004). In the preliminary analysis, the ideological positioning and empirical context were compared and contrasted to portray the two anti-market brands. Analysis began with the identification of dominant themes that are also suggested by the literature, e.g., the role of legitimization in branding (e.g., Fournier 1998). The emerging themes were then applied to the primary data. This iterative coding will be revisited after the completion of data collection. Despite the limited number of interviews and literature/media coverage regarding the narratives of the two brands, these all plot a promising course for future research.

The preliminary findings reveal that the anti-rock brands need to legitimize themselves through several processes that help them to resolve the tensions within the dramas they create. Meanwhile, resolving such tensions both empower themselves and their fans (Firat and Dholokia 2006; Thompson 2004; Holt 2002) and help them remain authentic. Importantly, anti-market rock brands seem to be authenticated by the tensions they create, but that has already been discovered by the managers and the music industry. Thus creating tensions and resolving them eventually help in the brand building—but only conditionally. Just for a start, these denote some implications for branding. It seems that the less the brand equity, the less it can benefit from the socially responsible and charitable work that can even work to destroy the brand.

The more the rock brands are empowered by the melodrama they create in the marketplace, that is the more they are able to set their own rules to fight against the market (Bradshaw, McDonagh, and Marshall 2006), the more convincing they become in their promises for freedom and hope. In other words, the more powerful they become, the more powerful their messages for the empowerment of people transmits thoroughly because being anti-market conveys the message of promising to defeat the market.

The anti-market rock brands successfully juxtapose the contrasting opinions of their activism and music and show us the postmodern marketplace of the future (Yazıcıoğlu and Firat 2008). Importantly, a brand has to be part of the culture of ordinary lives and even has to facilitate mutually constructed desires and the enrichment of meaning. The anti-market rock brands suggest that the marketing efforts are embedded in the brand itself in contexts where consumer participation is essential (Firat and Dholokia 2006). In the future of branding, the processes of this embeddedness seem to be put more in question as a fairly under-researched phenomenon.

REFERENCES


Assayas, Michka (2005), Bono on Bono, Conversations with Michka Assayas, London: Hodder.


Doggert, Peter (2007), There is a Riot Going On: Revolutionaries, Rock Stars and The Rise and Fall of ‘60s Counter Culture, Edinburgh: Canongate.


Norman, Philip (2008), John Lennon: The Life, Canada: Double-day.


